

The TENNESSEE CONSERVATIONIST

Volunteers Help Bledsoe Creek State Park

By Jane Polansky

In 2003, over 150 volunteers participated in more than 30 volunteer projects at [Bledsoe Creek State Park in Gallatin.](#)

Their unselfish efforts have enabled a streamlined staff (of two persons) to overcome seemingly impossible odds of achieving what many thought could not be done. Together, the work of two forces has resulted in providing visitors with an enjoyable, educational quality park experience, and the park with many needed repairs and desired improvements.



Members of the Sumner County Master Gardeners Association recognized an opportunity to achieve their certification requirements through park projects.

Volunteers work on a native landscaping project at Bledsoe Creek State Park in Gallatin.
Photo by Ashley Cripps.

Tonya Clifford, president of the association, designed a landscaping plan for the park office. The project introduces 39 species of plants totaling 139 plants. It will serve as a wildlife habitat, educational resource, and area of reflection. The project is funded through the Tennessee State Parks Iris Fund Program and is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2004.

Other members of the master gardeners' association have identified non-native plants throughout the park including exotic, invasive, and ornamental species such as Bradford Pear, Burning Bush, Butterfly Bush, Forsythia, Tulip Magnolia, Japanese Honeysuckle, Asian Bush Honeysuckle, Privet, Lespedeza, Vinca, and other ornamental flowers. These species pose a threat to native plants and rob the soil of precious nutrients necessary for their survival and propagation. The master gardeners, along with AmeriCorps volunteers and Juvenile Community Service Work Program participants, have assisted the staff in eradicating these plants and replacing them with native species.

In May 2003, due to severe weather and tornadoes, the park sustained substantial damage to courtesy docks, a half-mile section of the shoreline trail and a campground area undergoing renovations. High winds snapped and uprooted trees and turned two courtesy docks into partially submerged twisted metal water hazards. Sumner County was declared a disaster area and qualified for Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance. With the help of FEMA officials assessing damages and providing partial funding, these areas are being restored. Special thanks is extended to Jim McCall, AmeriCorps volunteers, Rick Decker, owner of Family's Tree Service, and the many other volunteers who helped clean up the storm debris. The fallen trees were cut into firewood and stacked at a designated location for use by registered campers. The tops of trees were chipped and relocated to areas of trails to be mulched. AmeriCorps volunteers designed and constructed a trailhead with woodchips. More than 20 volunteers devoted almost 100 hours to these projects.

Bledsoe Creek State Park has applied for certification from the National Wildlife Federation certifying a section of the park as a backyard habitat. Suzanne Shults, a Wildlife Habitat Steward, volunteered countless hours identifying and photographing flora, fauna, nesting sites, and other habitat features of the selected area. The replica she designed of the "backyard habitat" and her many photographs will also enhance educational resource programs for many generations.

It has been said that "you can't know where you're going if you don't know where you've been." With that in mind, a flora and fauna park inventory became a high priority. Bill Wheeler, a 25-year employee of the park and longtime member of the North American Bluebird Society, compiled a bird inventory. His bird inventory, coupled with the flora and fauna identified by Louis Levine, a park volunteer, will soon be developed into separate checklists and brochures to be placed in brochure racks throughout the park. In addition to compiling a bird inventory, Wheeler makes nesting boxes for many species birds that nest in the park. He and the Sumner Wild Bird Association members constructed bluebird boxes for the

park's bluebird trail. Wheeler regularly tracks and logs nesting box activity throughout the park.

Volunteer projects are also appealing to Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts alike. Previously, the park lacked kiosk information boards designed to display information about the park for park visitors. Tim Harrison, an Eagle Scout from Boy Scouts of America Troop 407, accepted the challenge. He constructed and installed one kiosk information board at the trailhead next to park office using materials supplied by the park. Other Eagle Scouts have committed to completing more of them. Countless visitors have enjoyed the convenience of obtaining trail maps, brochures of local attractions, and of reading about park happenings posted at the kiosk.

Ranger-led programs and volunteer service projects have helped many younger scouts complete scout badge requirements and have helped the park achieve its mission to meet the increased demands of park visitors. A year ago, Bledsoe Creek State Park received funding and approval to upgrade the electricity at 42 campsites and build a new bathhouse. Upon completion, the park will have a total of 70 campsites and two bathhouses. The campground areas, like other areas of the park, are being painted brown, a color that better reflects the image of a state park.

It wouldn't be in anyone's best interest to put paint brushes in the hands of Cub Scouts ages six and seven, even when chaperoned by adults. However, it is possible for the scouts to complete the requirements of their community service badge by washing campsite posts, water faucet posts, and water tanks throughout the campground. The area now painted awaits its final upgrades.

Bob Learmont volunteers his time and talent in many ways. His day-to-day maintenance work, from utilizing his electrical expertise as a retired maintenance foreman to simply assisting in the every day cleaning of facilities or clearing of trails, exemplifies the qualities of a park volunteer.

A pilot self-pay campground registration program introduced a year ago has proven to be quite successful. Many guests welcome the change and the flexibility it affords the ranger and campground host to engage in other park tasks. The campground host welcomed the idea of not having the responsibility of handling cash.

When you visit Bledsoe Creek State Park, think of the many volunteers who have selflessly given their time and talent to make your stay a pleasurable and memorable experience.

For information on Bledsoe Creek State Park, call 615-452-3706.

(Jane Polansky is the ranger at Bledsoe Creek State Park in Gallatin)